

"THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR"

# All The Year Round

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## JACK DOYLE'S DAUGHTER.

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### PART III. MISS DOYLE.

#### CHAPTER I. JACK DOYLE'S GHOST.

THERE comes a period, at least once in every life, when we are compelled, whether we wish it or not, to pause and to take stock of ourselves and our surroundings, unless we are content to let ourselves and them drift into hopeless confusion. We have been hitherto obliged to regard the history of Phoebe and of so many of her fathers as do not appear to be hopelessly lost, piecemeal; following out their fortunes, now with the eyes of a girl who had learned to see all things wrongly, and then again with those of a man who, if he saw anything rightly, had not the art of looking round things, or of imagining that anything he saw could possibly have an unseen side. As for the admiral, it is plain that his spectacles can be of no value to anybody who has nothing to sell, while Sir Charles Bassett and his old friend had their reasons for being blind, and the new generation of young men had no reason for caring about chance scraps of other people's lives. I cannot help feeling the need of mounting a little higher above the ground over which these people were walking without seeing more than a yard of mist before them, so as to take more of a bird's view of the plan of the paths that now begin so singularly to converge and blend. Phoebe, all unconscious of anything that happened beyond the four walls of an empty back-yard, had been, from her babyhood, the means of transmuting a Bohemian of Bohemians into a sober and successful money-lender—unless report, which can

hardly be deceived in such a case, did him too much right or too much wrong. Who was she? Nobody could really tell her that; certainly not the man who, thinking himself compelled by duty to obey the instincts of heart-hunger—a craving from which there is no reason to think money-lenders more free than money-borrowers—had given her the place in his life which, when empty and before it hardens and closes up for ever, cries out for the love of friend, wife, or child, wherewith to be at least a little filled. The act of adoption was sudden; but it grew as naturally out of his life as interest from principal. He must have been somebody even before those now far back days when he was Jack Doyle of the back slums; and when a man goes so thoroughly to the dogs, one may safely guess that he has rather more heart than his neighbours. The dogs are not fond of hearts that are colder than brains, and had rejected him ever since he had taken to make money. There was nobody who cared for him. That, perhaps, is too common to signify; but it did signify that there was nobody for whom he cared. He had sworn joint fatherhood to Phoebe, to the extent of some twenty pounds a year—a trifle, but his vow had made him what he was—and he was the only one who had kept it; a good reason to make him go on keeping it, if only out of pique and pride, to prove, perhaps, that a usurer is as good as a baronet and may be better. In effect, he was proud, angry, disappointed, hungry, and alone. And so—to the admiral's exceeding bewilderment—he had assumed the character of the one, true, lawful, and natural father of Phoebe Burden.

For it must not be supposed that the admiral—who deserves a passing glance

from our height of prospect—swallowed such a monstrous story as that a man, though twenty times a father, should come back from India to bother himself with a daughter whom he had never seen, and should pay a stranger over two thousand pounds for silence unless silence were a very important thing indeed. He was by no means such a fool as not to argue, “True—a promise is no security that he won’t carry off the girl and leave me to whistle for my money. He gives me neither address nor name to trace him by. But then—why want the girl at all? He either is her father, or else he isn’t her father. If he is her father, he needn’t have offered me a penny. He could have claimed her, and proved his claim, and taken her off straight away. And so, being her father, there’s something he wants over and above the girl, that’s better worth buying. And he’ll buy—or else he’s as sure I shall talk as that I stand here. And, if he’s not her father, all the more reason why he should pay. He can’t think me such an ass that I couldn’t find out what he doesn’t choose to tell. That girl worth offering two thousand for? Then she’s worth paying four thousand for. Nothing venture, nothing win. I needn’t give up that five pound a quarter from Doyle. And if anybody else asks after her? That isn’t likely, though, now; and if they do, why it’s easy to make her as dead as a door-nail. . . . And the boys? It’s a good job Phil’s gone. It won’t do, though, to tell them about that two thousand—or three—or four. There wouldn’t be much left at the end of a year. Let me see. . . . And I mustn’t tell them she found a rich father, or they’d be down on him. . . . I wish I could think of a tale for the boys. Let me see. It won’t do, merely to say that she went out for milk, or candles, and never came home. That might strike them as queer. What would a girl be likely to do? Put yourself in her place—what should I have done, if I’d been a girl? I should have been sorry to part with me, of course, but I couldn’t have gone on living with the boys. I should have gone on the stage. But then that would be a fine excuse for the boys to go to all the theatres in London. No; I should have gone off with somebody, with a young man. By Jingo! that’s the very thing. And it’s true, too, all but the young man. She made believe to go out on an errand—no; when I came back I found she’d gone, and left a note to say she was very sorry and hoped we’d forgive

her, and she wouldn’t do it any more, but she’d gone off with the man of her heart to be married (naming no names), and—yes, she’s the very girl that would do that sort of thing. And the note? Oh, I can tear that up in a rage. It’ll break my heart, I’ll never forgive her, and forbid them ever to name her name. And Phil? Ah, Phil! it is a good job he’s out of the way just now.”

So, changed even to her christian-name, dead to Sir Charles Bassett, romanced away out of the vision of her foster-brothers, efficiently bought from her guardian, there was no reason why Marion Burden, changed into Phœbe Doyle, should ever be heard of again; while nothing was more natural than that there should be a Phœbe Doyle. Who was she? It would take a clever detective to discover that now. He would have to connect Phœbe Doyle with Marion Burden, and Marion Burden with some unknown child who had been lost in its cradle days and had never been looked for. And the secret was less likely to be found out inasmuch as, except to herself, the solution was of no consequence to a soul, while Phœbe did not dream of questioning the solution she had received. Why should she? Doyle’s impromptu romance of her birth and parentage, though lame enough to the secret mind of the admiral, was real enough to her. She was Jack Doyle’s Daughter; and, as such, her grown-up history begins:

She afterwards remembered, with shame for such transgression of the first laws of the literature from which she had obtained her knowledge of the world, that Stanislas Adrianski had not entered her mind from the moment when she first knew that she saw her father to that when she found herself beside her new found father in a cab—a mere common cab, and not a chariot and four. Indeed, she had unlimited reasons for being vexed and disappointed with herself, as soon as the first whirl was over. The sudden wrench from all the early associations which ought to have become part of her very being had not cost her a single pang. She had forgotten to shed a single tear, while hurrying on her bonnet, for one of the boys, though she perfectly understood that she was never to see one of them any more. She had not felt faint, or resolute, or tender, or anything that became so grand an opportunity for bringing out the behaviour of a heroine. It was really disappointing

to find that she had spent years in cultivating herself to this very end, only to throw away the chance when it came. It was too late to know now what she ought to have said and done. Never, so long as she lived, could she hope to be claimed by another long lost father. But this was all nothing to her love treason. It had been impossible, of course, to proclaim her engagement to Stanislas then and there. But she might at least have scribbled a note to her lover, wrapped it round anything heavy enough that came to hand, and thrown it out of a back window into his garden. She could even see, in the air, the very words she ought to have used: "The secret of my life is revealed. Constant and true. In time you will know all." And yet, even while she was reading her own unwritten message to her lover, she was doubly troubled by a yet more shameful feeling—the consciousness that she was not even sorry for her failure to act up to her own knowledge of what romance required.

"What will he think of me?" thought she. "What will he do? The Duke of Plantagenet, when he lost Lady Adeline, disguised himself as a groom and got a place at the castle where she was confined, and threw the marquis who carried her off from the top of a tower. I must let him hear from me; and how can I write without saying I'll be constant and true? And that I love him? I do love him; of course I do. I must manage to feel it a little more. I'll give myself five minutes, and then I really will love Stanislas with all my heart and soul—"

"Miss Burden—Phœbe," said her companion, breaking in upon thoughts that, as usual, could not keep themselves within the lines of reality, however wild it might be, "I don't wonder at your asking no questions. I'm afraid you must be feeling—strange. But—you mustn't go on feeling strange with me."

"Indeed, sir," began Phœbe, in a tone as if she had been accused of some new sin against dramatic proprieties; "indeed, sir, but it is all so strange."

"You must learn to call me 'father,' just as I must call you Phœbe."

It would have been natural in a father, who had so much missed his lost child and had taken so much trouble to find her again, to have made some outward and visible sign of affection. But there were no tears in his voice, which did not even tremble, and

his hands made no movement towards hers.

She was glad of it, for it saved her from a great deal of trouble; and yet she could not help feeling that her father was unnaturally undemonstrative and cold. As for him—well, he could not, after all, manage to make himself her father simply by calling himself so, and he felt no temptation to use the advantage which his claim had given him over a pretty and seemingly over-docile and unassertive girl. Had she been plain, his part would have been infinitely more easy. But he simply felt awkward and constrained; the suspicion never entered his head or heart for a moment that he might possibly have been taking a hand at the old game of fire. He felt himself as safe from that as he had felt from ruin when playing to lose non-existent millions in the old Bohemian days.

"Don't you ever want to know your name?" he asked after a pause.

"Of course. Phœbe—"

"You are Phœbe Doyle. My name is John Doyle. I suppose you won't be sorry to know that I am what most people call rich, and you are my only child."

A brilliant speech came into her mind. Something to justify her character of heroine she must say or do.

"Am I like my mother?" she asked. "Have I her eyes?"

He could not help opening his a little. It was not at the untimeliness of such a question in a dark cab, where faces could only be seen by flashes when they happened to be passing a gas-lamp; but it seemed to betray a theatrical touch about the girl that did not please him. He had noticed her eyes, and his ingrained ideas of women as a sex were strong enough to make him fancy that she knew her own strong point, and wanted a compliment, after the manner of girls who are brought up among such surroundings as hers must have been.

"Your mother? No."

Not even then, to her extreme wonder, did the tone of his voice change. She had only thought of doing justice to the finer part of her own nature, and not of moving him, when she asked her question; but surely the mention of the wife whom he had loved so much by her newly-found child should have moved him deeply.

"I wonder if I should have loved my mother?" she thought sadly. "I wonder if I can love anybody—except Stanislas, of course? I wonder if my mother loved my father? He seems made of stone. And I

—do I take after him, that I don't seem able to feel anything at all?"

Doyle, too, fell back into silence, and it was really to think of Pheebe's mother—of that mother who had not only never died, but who had never even been born.

It was natural, after all, that her child should speak of her. But what was he to say? He had committed himself to saying that she was not like Pheebe. Well, he could make her like or unlike anything he pleased; and then he thought—

If our bird's-eye view has not yet been high enough to see back into the pre-Bohemian days of John Doyle, it was because they had been dead and buried, even so long ago as when there was a Charley Bassett, of Gray's Inn, instead of a Sir Charles Bassett, of Cautleigh Hall. Some ghosts men are able to lay out of their own sight, and therefore from the sight of all men; but what ghost is laid always and for ever? Not such a ghost as had once been slept and drunk out of sight—a spirit exorcised by spirits—by the Jack Doyle of old.

Pheebe, whether we can believe it or no, was the first girl, presumably pure and innocent, with whom, for a number of years equivalent to a lifetime, he had spoken more than a chance word. Even in his roughest and worst times, he had been a notorious woman-hater, and had taken no share in what used to pass for adventures and Bonnes Fortunes among Charley Bassett and his friends. It had been a matter of chaff among them, behind his back, at least, for upon that one point it had always been dangerous to rally him openly.

But there had been—who can have for a moment doubted it?—a cause. The cause was truly not only dead, but buried, as deep underground as the corpses of the past can be laid and buried by hands of men.

But—no need to say why—the fingers of women are stronger than the hands of men. It was not Pheebe's chance question about a woman who had never been, but Pheebe's mere being in the world, and the sound of her voice so close to his ear, and the immediate nearness of her life to his own, that had called up Jack Doyle's ghost to life again. If we have not caught sight of it before, it was because it had been too completely and successfully buried to be seen.

It was as long ago as when he was a

scholar of his college at Oxford, a place where, to the belief of his comrades in Bohemia, he had never been any more than they had been there themselves—for it might have been noticed that he chose his comrades from a strictly non-collegiate circle—that the shadow of his life began. There were men about in London who would have remembered him well had he allowed them to do so; but his holding himself out of their ken was hardly needful to save from recognition, in Jack Doyle, the student who was reading for a fellowship to be followed by holy orders. The sermons that he had written for the price of a bout of brandy he had once meant to preach from the pulpit, and the nickname of archdeacon, which had managed to follow him even to India, was a burlesque upon what might have been a very probable reality. The worst of him at Oxford was that he was so painfully steady a young man. He was more blameless than a young Quakeress, and seemed in as little danger of coming to any sort of grief as if he had been a monk of Mount Athos, where not even so much as a hen-bird is allowed to come. But, I suppose, the rule of the monks is no rule for the air, and that, at least, a hen-sparrow will chance to perch upon its hardest rocks now and then. Nor have I ever heard that the hearts of hermits, bookworms, or any other similar monsters, are less likely to take flame from a spark, when the time comes, than those which keep themselves healthily open to the outer fire.

It was with an actress—of all people in the world—with an actress at a country theatre, that he fell in love, not in any common way, but to the full extreme of unknown and untried passion. He was spending his last long vacation in reading at Helmsford, the little sea-side town where, by chance, he first met the girl. Of her, there is nothing else to be known; she is only visible to his eyes, and to all others dead and forgotten. The most inveterate playgoer may search in vain for the name of Miss Stella Fitzjames in his memory of the stage. He loved her so much that he made her a goddess, and did not even know that he was a fool. He did not read. He spent all he had to spend upon her, and more. He allowed himself to lose the class at which he had been aiming ever since he was a schoolboy. He cut himself off from a fellowship that would mean celibacy. He gave

up the calling for which he had unfitted himself as much as a man can.

Stella became his one thought, his complete faith, his whole world. He made no secret of his love; he brought himself to part from her in order that he might make a clean breast of it to his friends at home. He had already bought the marriage-license, and had left it in her hands. When he came back, after a hopeless rupture with his family, to Helmsford, it was to find that the license had already been used, and that, in the marriage register, there stood recorded his own name as that of the husband of Stella Fitzjames.

Who had supplanted him, and why in such a way, he did not care to know. It was enough, and more than enough, that his faith in Stella's sex had been destroyed, and that nothing, save death in life, had been given him in return.

No wonder he shuddered a little at Phoebe's theatrical question of :

"Am I like my mother? Have I her eyes?"

It was as if the ghost of Stella had suddenly laid a finger on his arm.

"She shall have had no mother!" his thoughts exclaimed. "She shall be good and true—she shall be like no other woman that has ever been. Phoebe—"

At last he held out his hand. She could not refuse hers, and he kissed it, but as little like a father as a lover. After all, it was she who had saved him from his worst and most desperate self—this child. He owed her more than two thousand pounds! In the midst of her wonder at suddenly feeling his lips upon her hand, the cab stopped—she did not know in what part of the town—at the door of an hotel.

#### NUTTING.

ARMED with a long hooked stick, and having an ample wallet slung over my left shoulder, I hardly know any pleasanter pastime for a bright breezy day in October than that of foraging for filberts in a hazel coppice. Just at this season the woodlands are in their fullest luxuriance. Autumn has only here and there, as yet, begun to lay his fiery finger upon the foliage. Otherwise, whatever tinge of yellow there is in the colouring of the landscape is derived from the golden stubble-fields whence the harvest has but recently been carried.

If you have gained any experience at all in the art of nutting, you know precisely where to go with a tolerable certainty of finding the ripest clusters. This will be no less surely the case even though the dingle you are about to enter has never before echoed to your footsteps.

Supposing the soil and situation thereabouts to be in any way favourable to the growth of the particular description of small trees or large shrubs you are in quest of—for they admit readily of being classed under either of these denominations—you examine first of all instinctively the outskirts of the grove you are approaching. There, as securely as in the slips or outer enclosures of a garden or an orchard, you rely upon discovering them if they are to be discovered anywhere in all that country-side.

For, if you know nothing else about the surroundings of the hazel, you know this at least: that free exposure to the air and sunshine are as essential to its branches as to its roots are the light loam and the dry substratum by which that light loam is supported.

What the daisy is among the flowers of the field, that the hazel is among the nut-laden bushes of Europe, Asia, and America. It is scattered broadcast over all three continents. It is restricted to no climate and to no country.

Among all our deciduous shrubs it, at any rate, beyond any manner of doubt, is indigenous. In its wild, or entirely uncultured state, it was as familiar to our remote forefathers, the ancient Britons, as it is to ourselves. As illustrative of this, "hazel," which is a purely Saxon word, signifies in that tongue, with reference to its fringy husk, a hood or head-dress, just as the botanical Greek title of the plant, "corylus," means to this day a cap or phrygian bonnet.

As delightful an adornment to our woodland scenery as any that could well be named, is this prolific nut-bearing undergrowth. And it makes good its right to be regarded as such from the earliest spring time to the latest autumn. Before the leaves of the hazel have burgeoned, before their germs even have put in an appearance, its numerous stems and sprays are delicately starred and tasseled, here with male and there with female blossoms. The latter, which are the less readily distinguishable, are the tiniest tufts of crimson, while the former are pendulously-clustered greyish catkins,

profusely powdered over with fertilising pollen, like so much fine golden dust. As for the catkins, they are all of them terminal—dangling, that is, from the spray-ends like so many aiguillettes ; the radiant little stigmas, on the other hand, being set close upon the yet unbudded rind, the hue of which is ash-coloured on the stems and of a rich clear brown on the saplings.

Cultivators of the plant, by the way, know well the trick of lightly brushing the female blossoms in February with a fresh-culled spray of the male catkins. When once the frondage of the nut-tree has unfolded, the glory of it not merely remains undimmed, but is perpetually enhanced until the very closing in of winter.

What first attracts my attention when I am approaching one of the finer specimens of the hazel, is the multiplicity of the parallel stems springing upward faggot-like from the one root, and then diverging from one another as they ascend in leafy luxuriance, until here and there a more richly-laden bough droops heavily under the weight of its shaggy knot of fruitage.

Throughout the summer, the leaves of the hazel are chiefly noteworthy for their dark and lustrous green, each of them being remarkable besides for a slight bloom of down upon its surface, as well as for the paler and thicker down discernible underneath.

As the autumnal season advances, the verdure of the nut-tree ripens into the richest saffron-yellow, the leaf-stalks retaining their hold upon the branches so tenaciously that they are only shredded off at last by the severest frosts of November.

Whenever I enter a wood in the nutting season, I there look confidently for the hazel as an undergrowth, but more especially when I observe that the oak tree flourishes in the neighbourhood.

As a rule the plant is far more of a shrub than a tree, seldom attaining any great altitude. As large a specimen, perhaps, as any known in this country is one at Eastwell Park, which has a height of thirty feet, its main trunk having a diameter of one foot where it emerges from the ground.

Scattered about England in various counties are localities so fruitful of the nut that the fact has been rendered patent to all by their distinctive designations. Thus, in Wiltshire there is Hazelbury ; in Surrey, Hazelmere ; in Cambridgeshire, Hazelingley ; in Northamptonshire, Hazelbeech ;

while in Suffolk, Derbyshire, and Yorkshire, alike, there is Hazelwood.

Among all our English counties, however; pre-eminently the shire for nuts—as indeed also for hops, apples, and cherries—is Kent.

Thither, consequently, I go by preference whenever I can find the opportunity, in October, nut-hook in hand and wallet on shoulder. There, in the green lanes, among the more umbrageous hedgerows, scattered even at intervals about the hop-gardens, skirting the boundary line of most of the orchards, interspersing the sylvan growth of every well-timbered park in the county, the nut-trees, in delightful variety, flourish as they flourish nowhere else in England ; in some parts of the shire, as for example in an especial manner towards the very heart of it, in the vicinity of Maidstone, with an extraordinary luxuriance.

Had this favoured shire a crest, as it undoubtedly has an escutcheon, it ought surely to be, as about its aptest symbol, the squirrel, of which animated nutteracker Cowley sings, in his quaint couplet :

He culls the soundest, dexterously picks out  
The kernels sweet, and throws the shells about.

Famous for its filberts as the county is, those choicest outcomes of the cultured hazel are of great variety, five kinds in particular being each of them of peculiar excellence. These are the red filbert, the white filbert, the frizzled, the thin-shelled, and the cobnut or Barcelona.

As for the red filbert, it is readily distinguishable as an oblong egg-shaped nut of medium size, which, when cracked, reveals a kernel encased in a reddish pellicle, formerly employed medicinally as a powerful astringent.

In contradistinction to this the kernel of the white filbert is enclosed in a delicate white skin or membrane.

What gives to the frizzled filbert its distinctive title, on the contrary, is not its internal, but its external covering—the ragged, curly, and dishevelled extremity of the green pod or calyx, in which the ripening nut is imbedded. Comparatively small in size, these filberts have the double merit of coming early to maturity and of being produced in great abundance.

The thin-shelled filberts, besides possessing that peculiarity, are noticeable as having their shells beautifully ribbed or streaked lengthways—striated, is the correct term, longitudinally. Besides these four leading species of filberts, there is, as already intimated, a fifth, which

nobly rivals them all, in the shortish, egg-shaped cob-nut, the shell of which is exceptionally hard and thick, but well-filled, too, with a crisp and flavorful kernel. Originally introduced into this country a little more than two centuries ago, in 1665, from Barcelona, this particular kind of filbert is variously known in England as the cob or Barcelona. Similarly, as having come in the first instance from Cosford, in Suffolk, the delicious thin-shelled filbert is otherwise spoken of simply as the Cosford. While, as indicative of how very recently these curious varieties of the cultured hazel have sprung into existence, it is singular to note the fact that the first frizzled filbert ever grown was nurtured, ripened, cracked, and eaten in a garden at Hoveton, near Norwich. Almost all of these five leading kinds of filbert have their husks or pods, according to the botanical phrase, hispid, otherwise covered with a sort of vegetable bristle.

Many other varieties of the cultivated hazel there are apart from those already mentioned. Each of these, however, in its turn may be readily enough recognised by reason of its distinctive peculiarities. The Downton, for example, a large square nut, is known of course as such directly its obtusely four-sided shell is seen or fingered. Another, a distinctly oblong filbert, accordingly as its husk is smooth or rough, is known at once to be respectively the Northampton and the Northamptonshire. Occasionally, or rather it should be said very rarely indeed, when you are out nutting you may have the good fortune to come upon a singularly beautiful little filbert-tree, the leaves of which have the peculiarity of being of a dark red or purple. Needless to say, specimens like that, however, are cared for more as adornments to a sylvan landscape than for any particular merit they have in their fruit-bearing capacity. More tempting by far in their way are those homelier-looking filberts, technically called "glomerata," or cluster-nuts, hanging like the berries of the vine in bunches, whence, in fact, the French name for them is, quite literally, "noisetier à grappes."

Once in a way, too, the skilled nutter comes, with a satisfaction he would hardly feel on recognising the red-leaved filbert, on the more fruitful Lamberti, or Lambert's nut, supposed by some to be a mere corruption of the German word for it, meaning the long-bearded nut, Langbartnuss. Of old the distinction drawn between nuts of a good and those of the

best quality, was by terming the former the short-bearded, and the latter the long-bearded or full-bearded—whence, according to a popular belief, by corruption, filbert. Quite as plausible, however, and certainly far more poetical is old John Gower's suggestion in his "Confessio Amantis," that the name was traceable back to the mythic age when Phillis, as he says, "was shape into a nutte tree," or, more precisely, into the almond; and certainly a colourable excuse is given to this notion, which must otherwise have appeared only fantastic, by the fact that the old English name, alike for tree and nut, was the philberd. Thus, says Caliban to Stephano :

I'll bring thee to clustering philberds.

Whenever I am wandering, nut-hook in hand, through the woodlands, I have an eye, even at a distance, for the upright growth of the tree bearing the cob-filbert, knowing well that the probabilities are, beforehand, I shall be rewarded. Although it may be overshadowed by loftier timber, so long as it is not actually under the drip of it, my hopes are strengthened. As I draw nearer, if I note that a litter of decaying leaves and grasses has gone to enrich the soil, I am more sanguine than ever that my spoil will be abundant. A glance upwards as I approach soon makes good my expectations. There are the nuts, clustering mostly at the extremities of the branches, where they are more fully exposed to the ripening influence of the sunshine, and to the sweetening effect of the fresh air. I have to make little or no research at the very beginning. Autumnal beams have already browned the fringy points of the drooping clusters. Some of the more prominent of these I can reach, and, with a rustling snap of the branch-stalk between finger and thumb, gather without an effort into my gaping wallet. Other clusters higher up and less accessible I can readily enough, with the aid of my nut-hook, bring within reach in their turn, and just as easily despoil. It is afterwards, however, when the nutter's difficulties increase, when he sees the goodliest, brownest, ripest bunches of all so far beyond the range of the utmost stretch of his nut-hook, that the passion of his quest gains upon him to so great a degree that he becomes at last reckless of the ravages he commits in the way of spoliation.

A couple of poets, each a very high-priest of Nature—Thomson in the last century, Wordsworth in this—describe,

with about equal zest, the ruthless eagerness to grasp the spoil evidenced by those who go out nutting.

In his *Autumn*, we find Thomson recording graphically how the sylvan explorer enters the secret shade in search of the clustering filberts :

And where they burnish on the topmost boughs,  
With active vigour crushes down the tree,  
Or shakes them ripe from the resigning husk ;  
A glossy shower, and of an ardent brown :

while Wordsworth, after depicting almost with rapture his reckless devastation of the nutty lair he has been despoiling, adds remorsefully :

Ere from the mutilated bower I turned,  
Exulting, rich beyond the wealth of kings,  
I felt a sense of pain when I beheld  
The silent trees, and saw the intruding sky.  
Then, dearest maiden—

he exclaims, in a sudden revulsion of tenderness, turning for sympathy to the most amiable of his listeners, his very soul overflowing in his words with more than the pagan pantheist's reverence for the hamadryad—

move along these shades  
In gentleness of heart, with gentle hand  
Touch—for, there is a spirit in the woods.

Judging from the extraordinary superstitions which formerly were associated with the hazel, the spirit lurking in the nut-grove would seem to have been of a weird, and eltrich character. According to an eccentric belief which prevailed in those more credulous days, the ashes of the shells of hazel-nuts had merely to be applied to the back of a child's head to ensure the colour of the iris in the infant's eyes turning from grey to black.

According to another fantastic notion, akin in its absurdity to the nursery legend about capturing a bird by putting a pinch of salt on its tail, you had but to stroke the deadliest snake with a hazel wand to stun it more surely than you could with a blow from any other bit of timber.

As for the supposed wonders effected in the way of discovering hidden springs of water and rich lodes of metal by means of what was known and believed in, not so very long ago, as hazel-rod divination, the world's literature abounds with records of that most extravagant phantasy. Its practice assumed to itself, indeed, the dignity of a science, that of rhabdomancy, its cultivators being known as rhabdomists.

So comparatively modern and staid an authority as John Evelyn has, with exemp-

lary gravity, set forth in his *Sylva* this amazing statement :

"Lastly, for riding switches and divinatory rods for the detecting and finding out of minerals (at least, if that tradition be not imposture), it is very wonderful by what occult virtue the forked stick (so cut and skilfully held) becomes impregnated with those invisible steams and exhalations, as by its spontaneous bending, from a horizontal posture, to discover not only mines and subterraneous treasures and springs of water, but criminals guilty of murder, etc., made out so solemnly, and the effects thereof, by the attestation of magistrates and divers other learned and other credible persons (who have critically examined matters of fact) is certainly next to a miracle and requires a strong faith."

How the mystic hazel-twigs were handled as a divining-rod by Goodman Dousterswivel, who is there but remembers perfectly well, who has, even though it be but once, looked into Sir Walter Scott's *Antiquary*?

"As to the divination, or decision from the staff," quoth Sir Thomas Brown again, "it is an augurial relique, and the practice thereof is accursed by God himself : 'My people ask counsel of their stocks, and their staff declarereth unto them.' "

"Of this kind of rhabdomancy," adds the author of *Vulgar Errors*, "was that practised by Nabuchadonosor in the Chaldean Miscellany delivered by Ezekiel."

Bearing in remembrance the wild and mysterious uses to which the hazel-switch has thus at intervals been applied in the lapse of many centuries, I seem, whenever I think of the incantation scenes in *Macbeth*, to recognise, as though in a lurid glare from the cauldron of the witches, the significance of the name given to Scotland by the Romans—Cal-Dun, or the hill of hazels, being the root-germ, according to Sir William Temple, of Scotia's beautiful Latin designation, *Caledonia*.

Associated in a homelier way, and innocently enough, upon the whole, with these eerie superstitions, were the once popular Scottish revelries of Nutcrack Night, as, north of the Tweed, the 31st of October is still called in vulgar parlance. Supposing the celebration of Hallowe'en eventually to die out altogether, the memory of it, at least, will be happily perpetuated by the lyric masterpiece of Burns, beginning :

Amang the bonny winding banks,  
Where Doon rins wimpeling clear,  
Where Bruce ance ruled the martial ranks  
An' shook the Carrick spear.

Some merry, friendly, countra folks  
Together did convene,  
To burn their nits and pu' their stocks,  
And hand their Hallowe'en,  
Fu' blithe that night.

Years before the Ayrshire ploughman had begun to tune his oaten reed, however, Gray had evidenced, through The Shepherd's Walk, that one part at any rate of those superstitious merry-makings was familiar in England, as thus :

Two hazel nuts I threw into the flame,  
And to each nut I gave a sweetheart's name.  
This with the loudest bounce me sore amazed,  
That with a flame of brightest colour blazed.  
As blazed the nut, so may thy passion grow;  
For 'twas thy nut that did so brightly glow.

Nor can this association of a nut with the beloved be regarded in any way as lyrically mean, seeing that Shakespeare shrank not from actually symbolising under a nut one of his most exquisite creations ; as where Touchstone says, in *As You Like It* :

Sweetest nut hath sourest rind,  
Such a nut is Rosalind.

As I ramble on through the Kentish woodlands, stuffing my wallet fuller and fuller with filberts of all kinds, cob, frizzled, red, white, thin-shelled, what-not, I cannot help fancying that half the enjoyment one has in nutting comes from a secret sense that it is in some sort purloining.

Has not Leigh Hunt sung of the fairies robbing an apple-orchard ?

But the fruit were scarce worth peeling  
Were it not for stealing, stealing !

And, oddly enough, as if to confirm my whimsical impression as to the almost sinful delight one has in nutting, there comes back to me a recollection of the opprobrious meaning attached to the very weapon with the aid of which the nutter carries on his depredations.

"If you run the nut-hook's humour on me," quoth Nym, in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* ; as though he had said in plain English, "If you call me thief !"

"Nut-hook, nut-hook, you lie !" cries Doll Tearsheet to the beadle in *Henry the Fourth, Part Two*, thereby virtually apostrophising that functionary, in so many words, as a rogue and vagabond.

A nutter returns, in fact, from a successful excursion into a filbert coppice, there can be no doubt whatever of this, with something of the self-congratulatory air of a freebooter, whose foray has laden him, at the cost of a few rents and scratches, with spoil well worth the gathering.

### A STREET SCENE IN FOOCHOW.

THE street in which we are, like all Chinese streets, is very narrow, very dirty, and very crowded with people, and this crowd of people is also very dirty. From the window of a foreign tea hong, or house, four shops can be seen on the other side of the street-way, and in each of these a perpetual business appears to be going on. The first is a shop where ropes and sails for the fishing junks are made—these latter deftly manufactured out of dried leaves and bamboo network, which same material, when conjoined, serves also for door and window shades, to keep away the too impressive rays of the too hot sun. Bundles of thick, knotted, tangled coir fibre are lying on the floor, waiting their turn to be tossed about in so penetrating a manner that scarcely one single thread will remain sticking to another, and a boy may now be seen, with two sticks in his hands, picking up, in hay-making fashion, and tossing the rude fibre in the air, and beating it upwards and downwards and sideways, like a magician with his trickery balls, until it reaches the floor again, clean and tidy. Previous to this, however, the rude material has been dragged and then pulled over the teeth of a formidable-looking iron comb, by which means it has been cleansed and relieved of stray atoms of leaf, bark, knots, and fragments of wood. The difference in its colour, in its first and last stages, in its transition from savageness to civilisation, is very great ; a dirty saffron-red, with darker splashes of oil in its original, becoming, after the beating-in-the-air process, a colour which would not be despised by a burlesque actress of the nineteenth century to tint her locks with. After its tossing, it is picked, with the ends as nearly as possible, where there are so many long and short, all lying in one direction, and then is placed upon a table in front of another artisan, who has a kind of wooden wheel in his hand. This, in a most happy manner, combines twisting the fibre into rope, and, at the same time, by means of a peculiar twist given to it by the worker, rolls the rope when thus made into a coil and ready for packing. With one part of the wheel pressed against his thigh, he turns it round with one hand, producing the above results, while with the other hand he feeds the end of the embryo rope from the bundle of fibre lying on the table in front of him. Then,

in the same shop, but in an adjoining room, a network of thin bamboo rattans is lying on the floor, and on it rows of leaves are being placed—large, thick leaves, which have already been soaked into a soft and pliable condition. A fair thickness of these being established, another network of the bamboo is fastened on the top, the leaves being treated like the meat in a sandwich, and the piece rolled up. This is used chiefly for awnings on boats, and over the windows and doorways of houses, its thickness being such as to keep the heat and glare from successfully penetrating through it. The same network, covered only with ordinary matting, serves as sails for the junks and smaller sailing craft, and its hard resisting texture catching the wind impels the boat along. They look very stately these native-fashioned junks as they sail along, with gongs and tom-tom beating invocation to the joss, and the brightly painted prow gleaming in the sun—a vessel

With all her bravery on, and tackle trim,  
Sails fill'd, and streamers waving,  
Courted by all the winds that hold them play.

At the entrance—or, rather, in front, for the whole width of front of a Chinese house is open during the daytime—sits a very ancient specimen of a very ancient people. Plaiting away with the tapes of split bamboo, with never a glance to right or left, most unwoman-like in her non-inquisitiveness or appreciation of what is passing around, there she sits—an old woman, a mere human machine. Her head is bent down upon her breast, a head over which some seventy odd summers have bloomed and winters have died, working, still working in her old age, and seeming happy in her labour. Her work requires no thought, nor even watching from the eye; it is purely mechanical labour in which the fingers, trained by long custom, fulfil their needed work. Does she think at all? Her face is the stolid, indifferent-looking face peculiar to her tribe, with no animated speculation, or discernible dreams of enterprise or glints of remembered passion lighting it up. But are there no thoughts of a past, no wonderings as to a future, as the life edges to the last scene of all?

The present—the living just now—is without emotion, without interest, save that a little maiden is bringing her a bowl of rice, and a morsel of tasty fish, with a dash of soy thrown over it. But even this can scarcely be expected to create a fire of sur-

prise or animation to her almost lifeless frame, with its almost death-like face, for has not the same monotonous repast, with scarcely even a difference in the flavouring given to the flat uninteresting taste of the plain boiled rice, been set before her each and every day for some three score years and ten that have passed away? The same monotonous meal has been set before her children and her children's children, and with no variations, save when, perhaps, on high days and holy days, a red-hot pepper-corn, as hot to the taste as it is red to the vision, or a fragment of root-ginger, has been added by way of a treat! There sits the ancient dame speaking to nobody, and appearing to see no world except that made by the mystic moving of her fingers as they weave the rattans together; if, in such a world, there lives even thought or fancy. There she sits in a silent solemn mood on her three-legged stool, with her crushed-up feet, like a pair of human drumsticks, crossed over one another, and bound in the tightly-tied bandages which have kept them in their stunted growth.

Here is a shop—all the houses in a Chinese street are shops of one kind or other—where lead-working is carried on; where canisters for holding tea are produced; where lamps for burning oil lights are turned out in highly ornamental and embellished style.

Naked, save with a girth around the loins, are the workmen here. One sits over a fire made of charcoal, on which is a cauldron of molten lead. Some thin sheets of lead are wanted, so upon a square block of thick pressed paper, a spoonful of the white metal is run. Upon the top of this again, another block of paper is placed, and on this the workman, constituting himself a weight, stands. This seems a poor, primitive, and rude style of doing such business, but mark the result: the top pad is taken off, and a thin sheet of lead lies before you, perfect, save for being uneven at the edges, and the paper-pad seems to be barely scorched!

Workman number two, with gigantic scissors, cuts this sheet into the desired patterns, fits and refits the pieces, a file bringing them down to the exact dimensions required, while, in a big box, with a wheel before him, like an English street knife-grinder, sits number three, with his lathe, turning corners and emblazoning devices.

The work when thus completed is washed with water and scrubbed with sand, and soon shines with the brightness of freshness and novelty.

The most remarkable feature about this shop is the fact that, while from sunrise to sunset these metallic operations are conceived, prosecuted, and accomplished, and the stock thus keeps increasing, nobody is ever seen to enter the premises and buy the wares, nor even to go the length of stopping to enquire their cost.

For many hours on many days we watched the place, got intimate with its inner life and being, and though bronzed sailors bought, on one side, blocks for their ship's tackle, and odd ends of rope vanished, and rolls of leaf-matting were conjured from the other side—nay, though the lead-merchant himself bought fish from the itinerant vendor, and his workmen revelled in luscious-looking squash, made from the arbutus berry—still no one seemed to think the lead-ware worth a cash!

But still they ate, and laughed, and loved, and lived. Perhaps, like their venerable neighbour, they may go on eating and laughing, loving and living, till old age, like hers, steps in and forbids more gaiety; may still, when the moil and toil of the day is over, read their fairy lore to one another, till the long evening comes,

When the last reader reads no more.

That very old gentleman, with the very white moustache (for, being a grandfather, he is entitled to wear one) and the minutest of minute pig-tails, composed of about ten grey hairs to a dozen threads of silk, is evidently the owner of the next shop, which deals in manufactures appertaining to ships. His shop is conveniently situated, for about a hundred yards further down the street flows the river Min. This old Methusaleh has a fine round face, pink as that of a new-born baby, and yet wrinkled with age. And all the day long he sits, the most active worker in his establishment, chiselling out holes in small oblong blocks of wood, into which small wheels are pinned, for the ropes to run over and along.

He is sitting on the floor of his shop, his legs crossed, tailor like, under him, surrounded with the chips and shavings of his work; and hammer, hammer, hammer, goes his chisel in the wood. But he and his staff work not a whit too hard, for rigging-blocks seem to be in great demand

just now. Every purchaser has a kindly word to give to the old grandfather, and a joke to crack with the workmen, for these Chinamen seem to be always brim-full of saucy anecdote. Sometimes a little grandchild totters along, and the old grandfather's face grows pinker than ever, as with that devotion to childhood so observably paid by old age among this people, he takes the youngster on his knee, and ceasing from his work, dips into some stirring tale of some grand and great rebellion.

But what good came of it at last?

Quoth little Peterkin.

Why that I cannot tell, said he;

But 'twas a famous victory.

Such a thing as hurry or bustle is unknown in the life and doings of a Chinaman, so ere the fisherman gets back to his boat, he will have gossiped away a good hour, and laughed himself red in the face. Perchance, too, he may have missed the tide, and so will not leave till morning—leave as a seemingly decent, honest, hard-working fisherman, until he gets out to sea, when he turns pirate until he has amassed as much plunder as will satisfy his present needs, when he will again be metamorphosed into a harmless fisherman, and will return peacefully to harbour, as if he had never heard of piracy, and as if throat-cutting and ship-scuttling had never come into his day's work.

Occasionally Methusaleh rises from his sitting posture to stretch his limbs. Then he shuffles in his clogs to the entrance, and has a chat with his immediate neighbour. Is he a good liver, this aged hero of across-the-way, and does he relish a good dinner? The fishmonger stops at his house, and produces a basket of most ancient-looking fish, which look most uninviting and mighty salt. Our friend examines these one by one, as housewives handle fish in Scotland, makes remarks concerning them, no doubt eliciting a full, true, and particular history of the life and death of each fish. Were he really to ask for this, he would get it, for the street-hawkers of China are wonderful adepts at fable-weaving, and clever at giving marvellously attractive discourses on their goods.

It is an extremely active and busy street, yet no confusion in its life seems to put its inhabitants out of humour. You see coming in one direction a pair of coolies supporting on their shoulders a huge log of wood, under the ponderous weight of

which they stagger as they move along. Facing these, and coming in an opposite direction, approach a string of chairs borne by coolies, and carried at that rapid pace peculiar to Eastern chair-bearers. These contain tea-merchants and brokers on their way to see how much profit they can squeeze out of the barbarian foreigner, through selling him a "chop" of the newly-arrived new-season's tea. How are these chairs in this narrow street to pass the log of wood, and the fruit-seller, and the old dame tottering insecurely with her miniature feet cased in her more than miniature shoes, and the ordinary passer-by besides? Yet these will pass and repass without a hitch, and with scarcely a jostle. How? Did you ever see a conjuror do the trick with the rings? He joins them to each other, and severs them again; and you never discover the secret of the split in the one you never touch, and the permanent interlacing of the others. See, the rings are joined and clink and clink together; he takes them asunder and apart before your very eyes, but how, you cannot tell. So is it with the crowds in the narrow streets of the Chinese cities: they pass and repass with an ease you cannot understand.

Coolies are hurrying to and fro with towers of empty boxes, a huge pile in front and a huge pile behind them, balanced on a pole, and they keep singing a kind of time-keeping chant, which is supposed, as in the case of sailors singing at their work at sea, to have the effect of adding rhythm, and thus ease, to their labours.

This singing during the process of work is strenuously engaged in by the natives of the celestial land, more especially by those occupied in pile-driving, the preparatory process of forming the foundations of a house. The pile is in the ground, with a wooden stage or scaffolding reared around and above it, and on this stage is a heavy weight, with a rope and pulley attached to it. The head workman sings a verse of a song, and then, at a given and understood word in the chorus, the other workmen let the weight fall on the pile with a gigantic thud, then haul it up, keeping it suspended until the next verse is over, and the chorus again prompts them to strike. Thus, by a combined effort of time and song, the pile is driven home to mother earth. Upon the principle that they are paid their wages for each day's work, and that all work and no play might

make them dull, the song of these workmen is a very long one, with only occasional choruses, and these brief enough to allow of only one attack upon the pile at a singing.

Women from the country are vending their vegetables from door to door in our street, and the lazy priest is strutting along; while these awful-looking specimens of tortured humanity, the filthy Chinese beggars, look almost more repulsive-looking in their tattered and dirty garments, than if they wore no dress at all, but exhibited in full vision their emaciated frames of bodies. These idle villains appear to be very successful in gaining alms, for they stand, or crouch, or lie—lie in a double sense—and, chanting a dreary and monotonous dirge, almost compel people to take pity on them, to get rid of them and their howls. Truly the Chinese beggar is somewhat akin to the dirty street he lives from and on, "the rankest compound of villainous smell that ever offended nostril."

But one of the block-makers is urgent in conversation with the itinerant barber, an occupation deemed of a somewhat degraded nature in China. He has evidently made up his mind to have a complete and clean shave, and the cost, considering all that is implied in that expression, is not excessive. He sits down upon one of the barber's stools—the other, which acts as a balance in the carrying, being headed with a brass basin filled with water, a lilliputian towel, and, underneath, a series of drawers with all the paraphernalia of the trade—and has his queue unbraided. His hair reaches down nearly to his waist, but in its dressed condition it almost touches the ground—a little matter of authorised deception easily arranged by the addition, in the plaiting, of long black-coloured silk threads, of which material the greater part of an ordinary Chinaman's pig-tail is composed. When in mourning, the colour of this silk is changed to white or light blue. The hair being well combed out (during which process the operated upon closes his eyes, as if, in a kind of trance, he was enjoying the soothing influence caused by the friction on his scalp) the barber sharpens his razor, which is a big lump of metal in shape like a butcher's chopper, and in size not very much smaller than that weapon. Yet with its keenly sharpened edge he takes off the shortest hairs on the head, around the ear, and on the eyebrow. The Chinaman gets

a "clean shave," that is, the whole of his face is traversed by the razor, and his head is shaved, save at the crown, on which a small circular patch is left, constituting the foundation for a pig-tail. And the ears are shaved inside and outside, a delicately shaped little lancet style of blade being inserted, and cunningly and dexterously twisted round and round, removing all hairs, but producing the common effect of deafness so proverbial among Chinese, as well as among their neighbours, the Japanese, who indulge in a similar harmful treatment to the ear. The shaving being over, the hair is replaited, and being paid a few cash, off struts the merry little barber to tell his last good story to someone else. And while all this has been going on, Methusaleh has been ruminating as to whether or not he will have one of the salt fish for his supper. He has detained the seller so long, has got such a fund of anecdote out of him, and handled the fish so often that he resolves to make a purchase. The fish is weighed, Methusaleh gets a string of cash, and counts off the requisite number. Some of these coins are very old and worn, so, perhaps, the buyer would not object to pay the debt in nice clean coins? There is no objection to this on the part of the buyer, who feels that he is paying for his song as well as his supper, and so the old cash are restrung, and new ones taken off. The next domestic bill to be paid by these now rejected tokens will be to someone who is not so particular and fanciful, and who does not throw in cheery little jokes and stories in the bargain. The man at the lathe-shop stops his wheel to purchase a pear from the fruit-seller passing by. The pear is peeled by the merchant, who uses a knife, the proportions of which are not unlike the razor of the Chinese barber and the chopper of the British butcher.

The first shop we peeped into is still busy making its leaf awnings, and the edges will have to be finished off with a split bamboo, and the ends of this hard wood will have to be burned and twisted. But how? Out in the street, amongst the feet of the passers-by, a bunch of shavings and chips is kindled into flame, and in the blue flame the ends of the bamboo are laid, and, with a little heating, become soft and pliable, and easily bent. Looking down upon all this, yet seemingly heedless of it, the old lady is still weaving at her cane-work, and, as the evening closes in,

the inhabitants of across-the-way pause in their work, till early dawn rouses them again. So run their lives away.

## THE ONE EWE LAMB.

WHAT bitter words were said to-night  
Beside my hearthstone desolate!  
What maddening sorrow brake the gloom  
Of this for-ever-haunted room

When solemn twilight fell,  
And I, new-robed of my delight,  
Came homeward, all at war with Fate,  
And deafened by her funeral knell!

Before the daisied sods were placed  
Upon her grave, my one-year wife,  
Before the blossoms, fresh and fair,  
Were hidden from the outer air

Upon her coffin-lid,  
A stranger claimed with awful haste  
The right to weep for that spent life,  
Nor could I those hot tears forbid.

He came from far-off land of gold,  
Whose shores the Southern waters lave;  
He came to scatter at her feet  
World's wealth and love's, to make complete

Their lives with perfect end;  
To claim her promise given of old,  
And found the silence of a grave,

Without the right that grave to tend.

And I, to whom they gave her hand,  
With full assurance of her heart,  
I, who a year ago laid down  
The dream of fame was to crown

The scholar's round of toil,  
And lived to guard my wife; I stand  
Aghast, confounded at the part

I played, my darling's life to spoil.

I thought to make her so content,  
I thought that love must answer love,  
I spent the wealth that God had given  
As freely as the dews of heaven,

To beautify her lot;  
I fenced with love the way she went,  
I hung love's canopy above,

But now I know she heeded not.

She was my wife, she wore my ring,  
My jewels shone upon her breast,  
And while I thought that time would be  
A friend to my young wife and me,

And bind us soul to soul,  
Like wandering dove upon the wing,  
Her wounded spirit found no rest,

I had no power to make her whole.

One year she went upon her way,  
The mistress of mine ancient halls,  
One year she blessed my quiet life,  
One year—one little year—my wife,

And now the tale is told;

I laid her in her grave to-day,  
But on that grave the shadow falls

Of one she loved in days of old.

"My one ewe lamb!" he said to me.  
This evening when the twilight fell,  
"The poor ewe lamb her owners sold  
To thee for shameful greed of gold,

My lamb that thou hast slain;  
For it was death to link to thee

The beating heart that loved me well,

And she hath perished of her pain."

And then he cursed me in his grief:  
Oh God! I could find curses too,  
To think of all my wasted cares,  
My love, my longings, and my prayers,

For one weak woman's heart:

But bitter words bring no relief  
For love so old, for grief so new;

No curse hath healing for a smart.

She was my wife, she wore my ring,  
But now I know she was my slave,  
I know each tender look and smile  
Came from a heart that ached the while  
For love of one away ;  
I could not win that blessed thing,  
Her girlish love—the gift she gave  
Another in a far-off day.

He, coming home to claim his wife,  
Lies prone upon the churchyard sod,  
And I would gladly die to win  
The peace my wife lies folded in.

My wife ! my wife ! said I ?  
Ah, Heaven ! the riddle of this life  
Is hard to read. She is with God,  
Nor can I claim her though I die.

She was my wife, but was not mine.  
I bought her, as he said, with gold,  
But in my heart of hearts I am  
Clean from all hurt of his ewe lamb ;  
I did not steal a wife,  
But had no instinct to divine  
Between a heart free-given or sold ;  
And so I wrecked my darling's life.

#### A LEICESTER OCTOBER CHEESE-FAIR.

THE Leicester Cheese-Fair is held down on the flat roadway stones.

Cheeses are studded thickly in every quarter of the wide market-place ; are close up to the kerbs and crossings ; lie heaped and sturdy, choking the very centre square. Cheeses are arriving still, from cart and waggon, from trolley and truck, and barrow. Cheeses are being thrown about in all directions, as if the flat old Leicester city were a scene for a living pantomime, as if a cheese were a fit missile, and every member of the company had taken to hurling them in a mad gay game.

Over night, and when it had been yet only grey and early morning, it was a different scene. All had been sluggish then ; had been done as if under mystery or gloom. A waggon had dragged itself slowly in ; when the evening had only just set in, when there was not yet so much dusk, but that the horses could be seen phantom-like, the carter and his helpers, ghostly.

“Have you cheeses here ? Has the pitch begun ?”

No answer. At least, no answer that had any result.

Another waggon came ; with slow clatter, with a little whip-cracking, with somewhat of muttered exclamation, with a low and prolonged roll.

“There are cheeses here, then, surely ?”

Yes. Not that the men bestowed any information, but that the waggon stayed, the clatter ceased, so did the whip-cracking, and the low rumbling roll. And the men, with solemn silence, let themselves down

from unseen places, or appeared upon the dusk from unsuspected doors, and surrounded the waggon, and unpinned the back of it, and dragged out a heavy tarpaulin, and cleared the way to strew straw down upon the stones. After which the men handed out a cheese, and handed out a cheese (quoit-like, as if the pastime were to be enjoyed by giants), and the men went on handing out a cheese, and handing out a cheese, till the pavement seemed likely to be encroached upon, and it was best to go a step or two beyond.

And as the dusk went, as the night stole up, as the gas gave better light, it could be discerned that certain spaces on the market stones had been appropriated. There were great surnames sprawled upon the kerb, in huge schoolboy text and schoolboy capitals, in assertive thick white chalk. There were broad divisions chalked straight out from these, showing the silent carters, as they kept driving up through the deep blue night, till it was dawn, the precise spots where their masters or consignees expected to find them, where they were to “pitch” their cheeses into the dark silence and solemnity, till their freight had been all delivered, and they could lead their emptied waggons away. Also it could be seen that straw had surrounded the cheeses, above and under, as they had been brought along ; that a tarpaulin, spread wide and heavily, had closed them safely in ; that as they were pitched out—two hundred of them, two hundred and fifty, from a dray—they were deposited on straw strewn on the stones again, were built up in sturdy piles to match the piles in which the cart had held them, were spread over on the top once more with a coat of straw, and had the tarpaulin relaid straight and smooth upon them, making a compact mound, or tumulus, of each cart’s load. It could be seen, moreover, that each cheese-mound lay there as solidly and snugly as if the cart itself had sunk to the wheel-tops through the market-stones ; had sunk down till horses, men, and all were engulfed, till only the cheeses were left, neatly packed there, without disturbance, on each cart’s floor.

In a short time, too, the motive for all this could be seen. The dusk had quite departed, the night had grown to be profound ; but these silent men had the cheese in charge, and in this close packing was the cheese’s best security, and the men’s best help. There is a mound of cheese to each man ; and all through this Cheese-

Fair Eve—through the long hours of it and the small—these men had to patrol there: sentinels to keep the cheeses safe. By their mounds, therefore, they paced about, or they stood still; by their mounds they passed a word to the fellow-man next, or they kept to that silence that threatened to become their law; on their mounds they sat and smoked (each man finding a seat on the edge of his tarpaulin, a solid cheese-stool); or they stretched themselves full-length for a snatch at a doze, to get rid of some of their fatigue. And in this way it had been their duty to see the moon rise, and the stars; it had been their custom to give the pleasure-fair folks a jest, as these, on the finish of their rollicking, passed by them home; it had been their method to keep to their guardianship and their patrol, whilst the slim old Tudor dwellings round the market-place were fading into repose; whilst the rest of the flat old Leicester city seemed sinking into more flatness still, as it shrank down into quietude, and there was no sound left at last, or movement, but only the hush of sleep.

The morning is here now, though, and the vigil is at an end. It is chilly still; it is grey, for it is October, and not much past six o'clock, but yet there is a suspicion of a stir, languid as it may be. It is shown first in the cheese-watchers themselves. These are shaking themselves out of their silent sloth; these are shrugging their shoulders, and passing their hands through their flatted hair; they are hitting their great-coated chests, and flinging their arms out to give a good hit again; they are looking up at the grey sky, to make forecasts of the weather, judging whether rain will splash down upon the cheeses, and beat them near to pulp, or whether the sun will soon be shining, to make the fair a day to be enjoyed; they are looking critically at the distant mounds of cheeses, calculating whether enough have been quietly laid upon the stones during the darkness of the night to make this year's "pitch" reach the average, or whether so many spaces are yet unfilled that they can prognosticate for certain that business will be "dull." There comes next their attention to their cheeses. They drag from off of them their sheltering tarpaulins. These hitch and hang, and want a heavy haul. They sweep away from them the straw the tarpaulin has been hiding, and that hides the piles of cheese in turn. They see their cheese-piles clear for sale at last, and

are looking warily at comfortable men they know to be cheese-factors, and who, they are aware, will be drawing near soon to taste. In which way, the stir having once begun—for all that it began, as was said, with languor—there is arousal, and arousal, till, hither and thither, in every corner and quarter, there is a lively tide.

"How is it going?" is a question put.

A shrug is the answer, a push-up of the eyebrows and the lips. What it means becomes apparent as the moments pass. It is, that things are to feel their way. It is that, for the present, scope is to be allowed for mystic "fluctuation," for that happy hope of a "rise" to the seller, of a "fall" to the buyer, that will find quotable shape in to-morrow's local paper, where the "spongy and loose" quality of some of the cheeses will get notification, where "exceptionally good lots commanding extreme rates" will be serenely praised; where such technicalities as "middling things, untrue in flavour," will exist, side by side, with "rough bad-coated cold" specimens, "got rid of at cull price;" and when a dairy-like and agricultural knowledge and experience will seem to be acquired by a royal road, as the oracular phrases succeed one another, and are simply read.

Now, however, this is not comprehended. We know nothing now of technicalities. Our business now is to study the manners of the fair; and puzzling enough they are, some of them. There is the mystery of an offer—a "bid." This is done furtively, with a whisper in the seller's ear, with a momentary colloquy only, as if it were a password tendered and returned, of which there need be no further heed. In which way somehow there is brought about this mirage, this glamour of "fluctuation."

"It's no use talking to you just at present," mutters one who wants to buy to one who wants to sell; when he, the desiring buyer, merely glances at the seller's outspread piles of seemly cheeses, and is passing by.

The seller makes as though he would stop him.

"I don't know," he says, like a passing whirr. Meaning, mystically: "Try me. Name your price. I will see."

It makes the buyer hesitate a moment, and throw another secret half-glance at cheese pile and cheese pile, taking their colour, their quantity, and their apparent quality in. But his thought is that if he suggests one hundred and five shillings, say

(prices going per hundredweight; and a hundredweight weighing, by cheese custom, one hundred and twenty pounds), the market may "fluctuate" down to one hundred and one; that if he suggests one hundred and one shillings, he may lose it because some other factor may think well to give one hundred and five. Silence is golden, therefore; and, like a shadow vanishing, he is gone.

There is another factor soon observed. This new one goes deeper into the purchase matter, as far as action is concerned; though, vocally, he is as near to inaudibility as his predecessor. Let his manner of procedure be noted; for, when this October morning is an hour older, it is seen to be a manner that everywhere prevails.

He is going to taste. He takes his rounds with a cheese-taster; and he thrusts this into a cheese he selects, he twists it professionally out again, he smells it from top to point, he breaks a piece off, and puts it in his mouth. As he lets it linger, thoughtfully, on his tongue, he returns the little cheese-roll to the place whence he had drawn it; he removes the evidence that it had been drawn, by a deft pressure of his thumb about the rind, by a scatter of the tell-tale crumbs; and then he wipes his cheese-taster dry with a wisp of the market-straw, he spits away the cheese he has been tasting upon the stones.

This seems to put him in a condition to deal. This enables him to say, shortly, obscurely:

"Ninety-six."

The seller is as obscurely amazed.

"I lowered it to your governor, I think it is, just now," he whispers, in *sotto voce* expostulation; "I couldn't do more. I lowered it to ninety-eight."

So, perhaps, he did; but ninety-eight is not going to be given. And this the mysterious young cheese-factor, according to his mysterious cheese-fair method, makes known.

"Don't talk to me like that," his whispered words are. "It shows me it's no use to bid. It's just too soon."

"It's late enough," insinuates the seller, in the moment that is afforded him.

But the young buyer, though he hovers about, thinking the cheeses too good to lose, thinking the chances of fluctuation leave something to be gained, names no other "figure," and no bargain is struck.

Bargains are being struck, though, elsewhere. Betimes as it still is, there are

drays, hither and thither upon the market-place, which have only just, hot upon the moment, been unloaded, and which are being, just as hotly, loaded full again. It is that the price offered for their whole freight of cheese has been accepted; that, as a young Leicester man expresses it, a cheese-maker "means to take his money home;" after which the cheeses are always carried straightway to be scaled.

There are arrangements for this. Two big booths are erected in the market-place, run up there by the rival railway-companies that benefit the town; and in either of them, according to the station to which the cheeses are to be conveyed, cheeses may be weighed gratis.

When this is done, the number of hundredweights and odd pounds over to be paid for will be known. Then invoices can be made out to match; then invoices can be forthwith settled ("credit" not being much the custom); and then farmers may become spectators, or buyers of fairings or ordinary market wares, or visitors to the shows and Grantham jumball-stalls behind, or sojourners at an inn, or friendly gossip-mongers in little hearty groups, as business or characteristics allow.

And in order to get the day's business as far forward as this, with as little ruffling and impatience as may be, the cheese-hurling is rapid and incessant, the men in charge of the cheese-scales are working like machines.

"Two, one, six!" calls out one of these, when six cheeses have been flung from man to man, and piled on to the giant balance by which he is standing.

He means that there are weights counting two hundred and sixteen pounds heaped up on the weights' side; he means that a clerk has to take the sum down.

"Right!" he cries to his attendants.

It is a cue that they may hurl out, from hand to hand, the six weighed cheeses; that they may hurl in, from hand to hand, six cheeses more.

"Two, one, six," he announces to the clerk again, when this has been done. And, after a second change of cheeses, "Two, one, seven;" and, next, "Two, one four;" and, next, "Two, one, eleven;" and, next, "Stop a bit, there!" for he finds he is wrong in his addition, and he cons over the rough iron weights, lifting them aside and aside, and hooking up the little ones out of their rusty topsy-turveydom to be more sure.

"Right!" he cries, when he has corrected his arithmetic. And then "Two, one, four," and "Two, one, two," and "Two, one, ten," and so on, as fast as his helpers can change the cheeses for him, till one man's purchases seem to be done.

There comes a bit of verbal hurricane then, that if it had lasted, and if it could penetrate, might turn some of the cheeses sour.

"I say," blurts out a thick-bodied blustering little purchaser, thrusting himself to the front, "this won't do, you know! This isn't fair!"

"Bless me, sir!" cries the weigher slowly, pushing back his billycock-hat and hair in his surprised and momentary stay.

"It's not going to be," declares the angry little man. "I won't allow it! Take those cheeses out! It's my turn now."

"Why—bless—me—sir," repeats the big weigher in the breadth of his innocence and his amaze, "they're all off the same dray, sir! Look!"

"They're all off the same dray," echo several of the bystanders in more or less vigour of testimony and justification.

Upon which the blustering little personage has to subside into "I see!" and to drop his unnecessary bluster, and to recede.

Over there, at the other end, past that group of hampers labelled, "From Dunton Bassett to Leicester Faire," there is another instance.

A farmer's wife (one whose own hands have veritably pressed the cheese-curd; whose own intelligence is the best her husband has at the skimmers, the skeels, the milk-pails, the cheese-tubs, the vats, the moulds, and fillets, and skimming-dishes) is the seller and the centre figure, standing, in a womanlike way, with her own pencil and book in her hand, being mistrustful of the clerk's accuracy, and womanfully reliant on her own.

"Right," her silence says contentedly; and "Right," and "Right," as her cheeses are put in and weighed, and she gives her best consent to the tally by quietly taking the duplicate note of it, and by doing nothing more. But at a certain moment she demurs.

"A hundred and seventy-five?" she says as a mild question.

"A hundred and seventy-five," reiterates the weigher sturdily, his eyes up to the booth-top, his hands to his sides in flat and purposeful disregard of the imputation.

The woman is somewhat cowed—she is only a woman—she is in the midst of

twenty, thirty, forty cheese-fair folk of all sorts, some of them boys, at the booth-mouth; some farmers and factors eager for their turn; some lifters, draymen, railway-officials, clerks, fellow farm-wives, various lookers-on. She is, mayhap, not so certain of her Table of Compound Weights and Measures as if she had earned honours at Girton; and it comes, amidst such scrutiny and overlooking, as a real hard effort to lift an opposing voice. Yet was it to be expected that the woman in her, the womanly recollection of milk milked, of cream creamed, of curd "come," of "sponge" waited for, and watched, and humoured, could allow her to lose the price of a pound or two of cheese; to lose the grocery she could buy for so much good money; to lose exactly that much of additional honour to her dairy? Not easily. So she blushes, and she stops; she puts out her pencil and points with it to the scales; she resolves, and uses precisely the words she had used before.

"A hundred and seventy-five?" put as a mild question.

"A hundred and seventy-five," reiterates the sturdy weigher sturdily.

And then something, best known to his cheese-fair experiences, something revealing to him the pulse of cheese-fair surroundings, makes him look down from the booth-top to the booth-floor, from the booth-floor to his scales, examine the weights lying in their heavy heap.

"Fifty-six," he says, counting, and putting one aside. "And fifty-six again; and twenty-eight; and fourteen; and fourteen; and four; and one."

"A hundred and seventy-three," put in the woman with a quick breath as he stops.

"Yes, a hundred and seventy-three," cry the bystanders, emphasising their cry with "Certainly, certainly," in resolute tones.

At once a sparkle rushes into the woman's eyes, a flush mounts upon her earnest cheeks, at which the weigher rubs his hat queerly up and down his head; at which a queer smile plays up and down his mouth; and, as the woman is in the glory of triumph, she may be left.

Emerging from the booth, there is capital and pleasant introduction to the other half of this October fair. For this has to be noted: The cheeses that have hitherto been looked at as being bought and sold by the hundredweight, as being pitched from dray to ground, from ground to scale, from scale

to ground, and from ground to dray once more, have been, technically, flat cheeses ; cheeses of the ordinary sort ; ottoman-shaped ; a foot or so across ; of the make that could stand this incessant handling and hurl and whirl. But the woman's cheeses had been the delicate Stilton ; at the woman's side all the cheeses were the delicate Stilton ; the product of small farms in such parts of the country as Thorpe Trussells, Ashby Folville, Whadborough Hill ; in such parts, on the "By" side, as Sysonby, Saxelby, Wartnaby, Gaddesby, Rearsby, Rotherby, Shoby, Dalby, Dolby, and many more ; and here, amidst these cheeses, amidst those who bring, and those who buy, amidst those who taste, and those who only saunter past, there are features observable of quite another sort. Not men, but women, are the sellers, as a rule. And the cheeses have not been brought in over night under patrol ; they have been arriving since five and six o'clock, and they are arriving now, and even yet they are arriving, in little farm-carts, holding, perhaps, a couple of score, and holding also the farm-wives who arrive with them ; and here it is in evidence that the farm-wives have purpose in arriving, and hold the situation, and have their way.

"They should coom arle out," says one ; and they "arle" are taken out ; silently, and without argument or hesitation.

"He waants it at eight and a haalf," says another, with a "haalf" closed eye that shows she is not meaning to let him have it.

"He says I aask too mooch ; that they aren't haalf ripe," says a third ; whilst the confidante to whom she says it buttresses her up with the comfortable recommendation, "You keep 'em ; and keep 'em waarm, and they'll soon ripen, I'm shoo-er."

"I were a-going to aask him to get a bit of bread," cries a fourth, indignant. "He bored into all this haamperful, and into that ; and he shouldn't ha' tooched wan or th' oother, if I'd known ! It's just that there are some people as never can afford to tooch a bit o' cheese, unless it be at Leicester Fay-er !"

There are the jests of the men with the women ; those jests that are far older than the men, or than the women either, or than the ages of both coupled together.

"The bootter o' this has been to market," is one ; "Ye cream yer milk," is another ; or, "Ye let it stand twelve hours, and then ye draaw for yer cheese from the bottom,

and that ain't the same as creaming, is it ?" "Taste it ?" is yet another piece of rural wit. "No ; tain't good colour enough for me ! Unless I took it with small beer !"

There are the wiseacre's remarks containing a host of sage philosophy.

"Ye may have them too dry, and you may have them too wet ; ye may have them too old, and ye may have them too green. Soom are good at a moonth old, soom at more. If ye've too mooch wind, it'll crack 'em ; if ye've too mooch sun, it'll be nigh as bad, anothier way. They may be too sweet for them as 'likes 'em sour ; they may be too sour for them as 'likes 'em sweet. If ye force them with too much heat, to get 'em ready for the maarket, ye make yer cheeses bad ; if ye put too much salt in 'em, ye make yer cheeses haard. Soom years I may ha' seen moore ; some years I may ha' seen less. It's haard to say !"

There are the little bits of talk among the women themselves. They have been up and about early ; they may be hours before they effect a sale ; and they sit on their cheeses, or on their emptied "haampers," or on chairs they have knowingly brought — folding-chairs, rocking-chairs, Windsor chairs—or they sit on three-legged stools, or they stand. It is all the same in the matter of talk, which comes in a fluent stream. This belongs perhaps to their agricultural life : "How many acres did he faarm ? Only twenty ? Why, he moight ha' done well at thaast !" This belongs to their life as mistresses : "Aah, I've had her three years, and she's in her fourth, and I mean to keep her ; for she'll get oop o' mornings, and it ain't every ghell as ye can get oop o' mornings ; though in the general roon, ye're right ; for if they're bad 'uns, ye may keep 'em, and if they're good 'uns they'll marry straight off !"

There are the broad and general and foreground details ; to be noted, severally, from the market stone steps, with the whole of the stirring market-place seen there in one wide view. These are men with double-pronged pitchforks over their shoulders ; and men with wide white wooden rakes ; they are market-servants to clear the ground of the farm straw, and collect it in a shed near by. These are ladies, buying one Stilton of a farm-wife quietly, and hiring a boy to walk behind them and carry it away. These are men with a Stilton under each arm ; are cheese-buyers, finished buying, and putting their cheese-tasters back into what seem to be

spectacle-cases, preparatory to going home; these are men with leather-leggings; men with note-books, writing down their sales; men wheeling hand-trucks full of cheeses, and crying "Way up!" to get a road, with evident relish of the stir; these are men strewing the sold cheese-mounds with straw, till they can be drayed away; these are men pitching down fresh-come cheeses on the well-placed spot from which other cheeses have that instant been removed; these are men in charge of a large tripod scale, weighing small purchases of cheeses, Stilton and flat both, and charging two-pence for the accommodation. Around, and athwart, and in the midst, is the great gilt statue of the county duke; the weighing booths; a few booths with fruit and cakes, cheap finery and cheap glass; the waggons, carts, trucks, and drays; a blind beggar; a beggar with a wooden leg; some clowns selling whips; some country lasses, striving so much to be in the mode, that they have passed right out of it; some hints of the everyday trade of the town, in boys carrying yarn, in women carrying bundles of stockings they have sewn; some hints of rustic villages enlivened by the fair, by a rustic youth who buys a penny coral necklace gleefully, and takes happy pains to fold it where it is not likely to get lost. And around, and athwart, and in the midst, are the great town clocks tolling noon; and tolling it at different times, too, even as the market-place tells of different times, with the Tudor houses pointing to Bosworth battle-field, and King Dickon sleeping in this city on his way there; and with the school-boys tumbling out of school, almost at the minute, pointing to to-day unmistakably, as they swoop amongst buyers and sellers both, as they draw out their wooden ball-bats to rap at everything, as they bolt at each covered up cheese-mound, burying themselves in the straw of it, or vaulting on it, heels under head.

Finally, there shoots into the mind, in a bright moment, the bright conviction that there has not been an ounce of cheese seen, as cheese is ordinarily seen, in this Cheese Fair at all. It has been an unintermittent contemplation of cheese-rind. In place of the deep smooth facings of amber curd that are familiar; of the fair inviting walls and wedges that are golden, and red, and primrose, and ochre, and cream; bringing appetite and (if legend is true) the digestion that ought to wait upon it; there has been the cold grey ugly cheese-coat, like

clay, like putty, like coarse oatmeal, like tubes of queer dough, like drab tin canisters, like rolls of bran, like sickly-baked loaves. Neither have all the cheeses (Stiltons) been upright and straight. Some might have been clay models of shabby hats, hit on the crown, and sunk. Some might have been sections of collapsed zinc pipes. Some are lop-sided and top-heavy, and bulge-backed; and comic, queer, nodding-looking erections, battered all askew. And so we take our leave of these unfamiliar cheese forms, and of the pleasant old-world Leicester Fair.

## THE QUESTION OF CAIN.

BY MRS. CASHEL HOEY.

### CHAPTER XXXIV. PLEASANT PLACES.

WHEN the two good women who took so deep and practical an interest in the welfare of Helen Rhodes held their final conference about her, Mrs. Masters expressed to Madame Morrison a hope that their protégée might get a chance of marrying. They were both sensible matter-of-fact persons, and if either had been so deficient in knowledge of human nature and experience of life as to regard the state of Helen's mind at that time as one likely to be everlasting, or even durable, the change that had passed over her before Mrs. Masters joined her at Chesney would have corrected the impression. But they took just such a change for granted, and they discussed Helen's future on that basis. Madame Morrison agreed with Mrs. Masters in thinking that a suitable marriage would be the happiest lot for Helen, but she had misgivings, founded on knowledge of her character, that Helen would consider her past history a bar to her acceptance of any other love, no matter how entirely she might reciprocate it. She had studied Helen closely, and discovered a good deal in her which had grown and developed rapidly. Her simplicity was of the frank and generous, not the weak kind, and the resilience natural to her youth was not accompanied by any levity of conscience. When Helen had attained the thorough knowledge of her wrong-doing, she did not dally with conviction and repentance, and the more far-seeing of her two friends felt sure that she would bear all her life what she would take to be the penalty of it. She did not enter into this view of the subject with Mrs. Masters.

It would have been difficult to impart it to her, she had come upon the scene of events too late to understand the whole of their details and bearings, and she was associated with so complete and fortunate a change in Helen's destiny that it was natural she should not quite realise what had been the moulding influence of the past upon the girl's spirit.

"She shall be nominally our children's governess," Mrs. Masters had said, "so that any sense of dependence and obligation should be removed, but neither Colonel Masters nor I will ever regard her otherwise than as an adopted daughter. I can answer for him in this matter with perfect confidence; all that I do will have his entire approval. If I go out to India again—and I may have to go, unless my husband leaves the service, when the children are old enough to go to school—I shall take her with me. She will be certain to marry there."

Madame Morrison repeated this to her niece, and awaited her comment upon it with some curiosity. But Jane shook her head doubtfully and said :

"I do not think Helen will ever marry. She might find a man who would forgive her easily enough, but she will never forgive herself. No, aunt; our pretty Helen will be an old maid; a happy and contented one, please God, but still an old maid."

"I think so too," assented Madame Morrison, "and I am sorry for it, the more so as she will be a poor old maid. However, we will not think of that just now, but of her present happy fortune. There's a good old Irish saying that tells us, 'It is time enough to bid the Devil good-morrow when you meet him.'"

And so her best friends parted with her, and missed her, yet felt happy about her, and settled back into their old ways without her. She wrote frequently to Jane, and her letters were so full of the peace and serenity, the cheerful occupations and the kindly security of her life at Chesney Manor, that it became difficult for Madame Morrison and Jane to realise the painful and mysterious incidents in which she and they had been concerned. The story was only a few months old, and it already seemed like a dream to them. And yet, there had not been an utter lack of the unexpected, either, for Helen's discovery that Mr. Warrender's next neighbour was the brother of Mrs. Townley Gore, and that she and Mr. Townley Gore were

actually staying at Horndean, had been duly communicated to Jane. Helen also told her of the precautions she had taken in consequence, and it was therefore an anxious time for her friends when they were expecting her narrative of the arrival of Mrs. Masters at Chesney Manor, and the subsequent explanation with the Horndean people.

When Helen's letter reached them, it announced the adjournment of that explanation to an indefinite period, and related the visit of Mr. and Mrs. Townley Gore, adding that it was only to announce their immediate departure, and so she had escaped for the present. The prospect for the winter was a delightful one, Helen wrote, and Mr. Warrender said she was an admirable private secretary. She was becoming quite an adept in "making references," and enjoyed very much all the copying she could induce him to let her do; for Mr. Warrender was an author, but that was a secret, and, for all that, she was not a bit afraid of him. Mrs. Masters was very much better, able to drive out, though not yet to walk, and in wonderfully good spirits—considering. The weather was lovely; the children and she had a long walk every morning, when Mr. Warrender went out with them, and that was his little nieces' best lesson-time, for he knew everything, all about the trees, and the animals, the birds, the insects, and the history of the place, and he told them things in such an interesting way. The children were very fond of their uncle. He seemed to have a great deal of business to transact in reference to the estate. Helen had never understood before that there was anything to be done about a fine house and a big place except to enjoy them, but she was learning every day she lived at Chesney Manor. The quick and just perception that had enabled her to apprehend Mrs. Townley Gore's character with correctness which that lady little suspected, was no less quick and just now that it had such opposite employment. The tender and grateful heart that had been so ruthlessly crushed, having risen like strong sweet herbage when the trampling foot was removed, gave out its fragrant strength of love and gratitude.

Jane Merrick was very thoughtful over this particular letter of Helen's. She read it aloud to her aunt, then read it again to herself, folded it up slowly, and said, after a long pause :

"I am trying to remember what Mr.

Warrender is like. I hardly looked at him that day he came here and saw Helen in Miss Smith's wedding finery. How old is he, aunt?"

"About forty, I should think. Perhaps a little more."

"Not at all handsome, is he?"

"Well, no, perhaps not," said Madame Morrison reflectively. "He is one of those rare persons about whom one never thinks whether they are handsome or not—the matter of their looks is so unimportant. I could not describe Mr. Warrender's features, except the bright blue eyes, for I never thought of them; but the impression his face gives of intellectual power, thorough goodness, and serene sweet temper, is very striking. I remember thinking, the first time I saw him, 'That is the most fearless face I ever looked at.'"

"He seems to be a most devoted brother."

"He is indeed, and his sister is much attached to him. She said to me, when she propounded her views about Helen, that her brother was the best man in the world."

"And yet she did not tell him all."

"No; but that was not for her own sake. It was entirely for Helen's. She had not the least fear that if he had known all, he would have opposed her doing what she did."

"I almost wish Mrs. Masters had told him. I think it would have been safer."

"Safer?"

Mrs. Morrison laid her work on her knee, and looked up at Jane in surprise.

"Yes, safer. Helen is in a false position towards Mr. Warrender."

"Yes, to a certain extent; but I cannot see that it matters. And it would have been so very awkward."

"True, true," said Jane. "Perhaps it is all for the best. No doubt Mrs. Masters was the person to decide."

"Certainly, my dear. It would not have become me to offer an objection, even if one had occurred to me."

Here the conversation dropped. But Jane read Helen's letter again that night, and said to herself:

"However awkward it might have made the position, I am sure it would have been safer to tell him."

Time—so happy and so peaceful, that when she looked back at it afterwards its hours seemed to Helen to have been winged—was going by, and the chief

characteristic of life at Chesney Manor would have appeared to outsiders to be a cheerful and occupied monotony. The stranger within the gates had as entirely ceased to be a stranger in her own feelings as her friends could desire, and when she thought of the past, so recent and yet so immeasurably distant, it was with the trustful thankfulness of a creature who after shipwreck is in a safe haven.

Her views of what would constitute happiness, if happiness had indeed that existence in which she once believed, were changed beyond all recognition, and she found herself thinking of herself—she was too young to turn from that unprofitable subject—as having got all her storms over early betimes, and with them also the noon tide glory. The evening had come to her very soon and suddenly; but it was clear and tranquil. The pensiveness of her mind was free from sickly melancholy, because she was sincere and unaffected; but the seal of sedateness had been set upon her demeanour by sorrow, and there was no hand to lift it evermore.

Helen was entirely unconscious of the attractiveness of the composed and considerate mien, the low and gentle voice, the soft movements, the smile that came but rarely and broke slowly over the fair candid face, the ready but quiet obligingness, and the unfailing observant care for others in everything, that were all characteristic of herself. From any perception and sense of her own beauty she would shrink with a sharp pang and put them from her with aversion, for was it not that which had betrayed her?

He had cared for that only, and so little and so briefly, and she had taken the foolish feeling for love! Of its ignobleness Helen had not the most distant notion. She had only learned its insufficiency, its futility, and she shunned the idea that she was beautiful, because there was a humiliation in it. That was all the man whom she had loved and trusted, and who had forsaken her, had ever known about her, or cared to know. She remembered this now; she remembered the constant praises that had then sounded so sweet and were now sickening to her memory, and she would avoid the sight of her own face in a looking-glass for days together. This, however, would be when she suffered slight relapses into the malady of introspection; her mood was generally more healthy, her liberty of spirit greater.

And, as if it were her destiny to be placed at the opposite poles of experience, Helen began to stand in some little danger of being spoiled at Chesney Manor.

Mrs. Masters, who had become exceedingly weary of the female companions to whose society she was restricted at Chundrapore, and of whom Mrs. Stephenson was an above-the-average sample, was quite fascinated by her young protégée. It added to the pleasure with which she once more found herself in the ample and luxurious home of her early years, that she could make this girl, who had suffered so much, feel that it offered to her a free, heartfelt, and unembarrassing welcome. She consulted Helen as if she had been a daughter, she occupied herself with her, she delighted in her presence, she made her a resource and a pleasure, and enjoyed to the utmost the satisfaction of having gone far beyond the intentions towards Herbert Rhodes's child with which she had left India. No mother, she flattered herself, would have been more solicitous, more keen-sighted for a daughter than was she for Helen; and yet there was one fact, nearly concerning her, of which Mrs. Masters was entirely unobservant.

This fact was that Mr. Warrender had fallen in love with her beautiful young friend, in as decided and expeditious a manner as if he were not a middle-aged gentleman who had had losses in his time, and outlived them without very grave difficulty.

That his sister should not have found him out was less remarkable than Mr. Warrender considered it to be. She was several years his junior; but so accustomed to regard herself as an old married woman, with all the fancies and the coquettices of life delightfully far away from her, and all its precious bonds and sacred charities close about her, that she classed her brother quite among the elders, and looked upon him, too, as beyond any stormy vicissitudes of feeling. She had never formulated the belief, but she entertained it, that to be her husband's brother-in-law, her own brother, the uncle of Maggie and Maud, and Mr. Warrender of Chesney Manor to boot, was all John ought to desire in this world. And he had got it all; he was a perfectly happy and contented man.

Of his one love-story she had not known much; it had been told after her marriage and during her absence from England. It was a very simple story; there are hundreds like it happening every year.

Mr. Warrender had lost his betrothed by the English plague—consumption. The girl was marked down by the fell disease before he had ever seen her; she died a few weeks before the time fixed for their marriage; he had passed several months in hopeless attendance upon her, while she had never ceased to hope, and to assure him that she should soon be quite well.

He had borne it all very quietly, and having narrated it simply to his absent sister, had henceforth held his peace and gone his way, for a long time wearily, but always bravely and well. The story was an old one; the grave in Notley churchyard had been kept green for ten years when Helen Rhodes came to Chesney Manor, and Mr. Warrender had not in the interval been known to be more than politely conscious of the existence of any woman.

We have seen how Mrs. Townley Gore regarded such indifference; to his sister it appeared the most natural state of things, especially as she was not included in its conditions. That it ceased to exist surprisingly soon after the accidental intrusion of Mr. Warrender upon the "rehearsal" in Madame Morrison's show-room, and was speedily replaced by a love as true and devoted as ever woman won, for the girl whom his sister had befriended, she had not the least suspicion.

Her brother's "ways" were those of a thoroughly domestic man; he was with herself and Helen at all times when he was not imperatively obliged to attend to some business elsewhere; he was evidently happy in their society, and never "put out" by the children. Chesney Manor was certainly not a lively place of sojourn, but he never seemed to want to go away from it, and his attention to the two ladies surpassed that which might be expected from a model brother and host by the most sanguine. That these were symptoms never occurred to Mrs. Masters; she had always known her brother to be the kindest, the gentlest, the bravest of men, but she had been long unfamiliar with his habits, and saw nothing to wonder at in his home-loving ways. Formerly there were only his books for him to care about, now there were herself and the children, and Helen. He was so happy with them all that she could not bear to allude to that possible prospect of her returning to India, and taking Helen with her.

And Helen; was she, as the wintry days

crept on, and the pleasant prospect of congenial society and favourite occupations realised itself, equally unconscious of the feelings with which Mr. Warrender regarded her? Did she suspect that he loved her, with a love that the noblest of women might have been proud to win, and which, could she but have held herself free to accept it, would have made her enviable among the happiest? Had she any notion that this accomplished scholar, this man of weight and importance in the land, this unknown poet, this perfect gentleman, was torn and tossed with conflicting hope and fear which had her for their object. The hope that he might win her bright beauty and her innocent girlish heart; the fear that in her eyes he could never be other than a grave elderly man, a kind protector, to be regarded with grateful and respectful liking, which would be intolerable to him; a stone on which his teeth should be broken, while he was craving for the bread of life?

As the wintry days crept on, Helen began to dread that something was coming to trouble her new-found peace, to disturb the lines that had been laid in such pleasant places. She would not have been, at that stage of her life, capable of understanding the full meaning of being loved by such a man as Mr. Warrender, but she had listened to words and received looks of love, and no woman to whom those have come can fail to recognise the feeling that they interpret even before it has taken their form. She recognised it, with profound amazement, with a wild attempt at incredulity, and with a deep-seated, despairing dread. Was she a creature accursed of fate, that she should bring misery to those whom she loved, and who had so nobly befriended her? It was no impulse of vanity that moved her to this desolate cry of the soul; she knew that love unrequited, love disappointed, however unworthy the object, or wasted the passion, means suffering that seems, for the time at least, to be unbearable. That such a man as he whose life and character she had been studying with the delight that might have been inspired by a revelation, should love her, was simply amazing, but she did not dwell on this, she thought only that he would have to suffer through her agency. When he should know the truth about her, what pain he would have to undergo! Helen did not wonder at all at her own keen-sightedness, nor did she trifle with the serious thoughts which her discovery

brought with it by any sentimental rebuking of herself for presumptuous fancy; she was too sincere for that. However great the wonder that Mr. Warrender should love her, she knew he did, and that was the fact which she had to deal with. It changed the whole aspect of her life, it destroyed her peace, disturbed her security, endangered the recently formed relations that were so precious to her; in every rational sense it was a terrible evil, and yet—she fought with herself, she blushed for herself, but down deep in her heart there was exultation. In vain she reminded herself that when he should know the truth about her he would cease to love her, that he was cherishing a delusion and would renounce when he detected it; she did not believe her own argument; something—it was not hope; that had no place with her—told her that he would love her still.

And then, amid all the confusion, the apprehension, and the misery that had suddenly arisen and encircled her with a bewildering cloud, Helen knew one thing quite clearly, and knew that the strength of its consolation could never fail; that she was happy because he loved her, happy in spite of everything, notwithstanding the inevitable parting that awaited her, happy let what might come. What was she to do? Must she wait until he had spoken the words to her that would force her to separate herself for ever from him, and the home that was so dear to her, or were there any means by which she might avert that blow? Could she venture to anticipate it, and entreat Mrs. Masters to tell all the truth concerning her to Mr. Warrender.

Helen's ignorance of the world, and her natural simplicity, rendered her, happily for herself, unconscious of the many-sided objections which might fairly be raised against the step which something subtler and stronger than reason told her Mr. Warrender contemplated, and therefore, none of the misgivings that would have beset a more worldly-wise person came to turn her from contemplating this course. Mrs. Masters was to her all that she had imagined a mother might be; she would certainly have taken such a trouble as this to her own mother; she would take it to Mrs. Masters. And, when Mr. Warrender should have learned from his sister that love and marriage were closed chapters in the story of Helen's life, he would forgive her the pain she had made him suffer, and they

should be friends—in so far as with her insignificance she could be the friend of so great-souled a man—always. Thus did Helen, with the beautiful facility and pertinacity of youth in finding a way out of its difficulties without paying the toll, arrange a solution which merely lacked, to render it possible, the taking into account of human nature.

It was after one of the morning walks, in which Mr. Warrender joined the children and their governess, that Helen had found herself face to face with this new trouble.

Christmas was near; the weather was bright and frosty; the great logs burned briskly with a pleasant crackling sound on the wide hearth of the library; the spacious room looked very comfortable in the winter evenings when the little party of three occupied it. On the evening of that same day, Mrs. Masters being called away by the nurse, Helen found herself again tête-à-tête with Mr. Warrender, and, with a novel sense of nervousness and confusion, she began to talk of the book she had been reading. It was on the subject of popular superstitions, and Mr. Warrender took it up and read a page or two.

"It must be difficult to avoid unlucky incidents in some countries, according to their notions," said Mr. Warrender; "and betrothed lovers should be provided with a pocket code for their instruction. I see they must not exchange gifts of knives, scissors, hair, or prayer-books; a bridegroom must not see his bride's wedding-gown before she wears it at the altar, and a bride must not have the wedding-ring in her possession beforehand. And here are cautions for mere aspirants: an unbetrothed girl who puts on the wedding-veil of a bride will never be married; a betrothed girl who puts on the cap of a new-made widow will be a widow herself. How absurd!"

He threw down the book and looked at Helen. The trouble in her face struck him, and at the same instant he remembered how he had seen her first, and knew that she too remembered it.

With a desperate effort Helen seized the chance that had offered itself.

"The omen will not be belied by me,"

she said; "the first time I ever saw you I wore the wedding-veil of a bride, and I shall most certainly never be married."

"Helen! What do you mean? Is this—"

She put up her hand imploringly and stopped him.

"Do not ask me any questions, Mr. Warrender; and never, never let us speak of this again. You are so good to me, I am glad you should know I have had a disappointment, and I shall never be the wife of any man."

"You—so young!" His voice was almost inarticulate.

"Yes, I was very young. But it is so; and—" She was unable to say more, and fell back in her chair, covering her face and trembling.

Very quietly he approached her, and drew down her hands, holding them firmly while he spoke:

"I know why you have told me this, and it was nobly done. Have no fear, either for yourself or me."

He dropped her hands and resumed his seat as Mrs. Masters re-entered the room.

"There's nothing really wrong with Maggie," she said gaily, "and I have brought you some news. Look up from your books, both of you. There's a wedding afoot!"

"Indeed," said Mr. Warrender. "Whose Nurse's, perhaps."

"Mr. Horndean's. I wonder how Mrs. Townley Gore will like it? It seems that Mr. Horndean is going to marry a Miss Chevenix, a great beauty by all accounts. She was down here in September, and caused quite a sensation."

"I have seen Miss Chevenix," said Helen; "she is a great favourite with Mrs. Townley Gore."

"Did you like her? Is she nice?"

"I should not have dared to like her; she did not take any notice of me. She is very beautiful."

"When are they to be married?" asked Mr. Warrender.

"Shortly after Christmas; and they are coming direct to Horndean. I heard all the news from nurse, who heard it from Dixon, who heard it at the post-office."

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